

Economic Development Advisory Council
April 13, 2016 Meeting minutes
Americana Room – Hampshire Hills

Matt Ciardelli, Ciardelli Fuel Co - Chairman
Chad Brannon, Fieldstone Land Consultants, PLLC
Chris Costantino, Conservation Commission
Mark Fougere, BOS Lyle Fulkerson, HPM Insurance
David Hammer, Contemporary Chrysler, Jeep
Wendy Hunt, MIT
Don Jalbert, Milford HS Applied Technology Center
Janet Langdell, Planning Board
Heather Leach, Granite Bank
Tracy Hutchins, Chamber of Commerce
Jason Plourde, Tighe and Bond
Penny Seaver, Bean Seaver & Smith
Dale White, Leighton A White, Inc.

Lincoln Daley, Community Development Director
Mark Bender, Town Administrator

Matt Ciardelli called the meeting to order at 7:30AM.

Minutes:

H. Leach made a motion to accept the minutes from 11/18/15, as presented. W. Hunt seconded and all in favor.

Community Development Update:

L. Daley said we have a bid from Kingsbury Companies out of Vermont, for the South St project. It came in about 10% over, but there are additional funds available at the federal level to cover that. We are waiting for Federal Highways to work through some accounting changes and accept the bid as complete and we should be on track to start construction in early May. We have also started work on the next phase which will be for improvements to the Oval area and along Nashua St and we are fortunate in that we still have enough funding remaining in the Earmark Fund to cover the next phase of this overall project.

H. Leach inquired about South St disruptions. L. Daley answered that once we meet with the contractor, we will determine the timetable we will have an outreach program with the local businesses and residents. It will be a coordinated effort between the Police, DPW and the Town in general. The project will be disruptive and there may be frustration, but our goal is to really educate the people and provide as much information and direction as we can; visual signage, website information, updates at BOS meetings.

M. Bender reviewed the summer schedule of DPW work, which included sidewalks, ditches, privately funded projects such as the CVS improvements and state improvements to NH 101 and Federal Hill Rd. The list can be found on the website. We also have some bridgework scheduled thanks to the voters passing the warrant article. L. Daley added that we will have a number of projects this year that will affect roadways in the downtown area; the Fletcher Site cleanup, CVS, South St, the 55+ condo project at Mont Vernon & North River Roads. Again, we will work with residents and businesses to keep everyone informed and our goal would be to get everything done by Pumpkin Festival.

D. White said construction in Milford is better this year than has been over the past fifteen or so years. L. Daley added that we have a number of subdivisions coming on line this year. We have already issued permits for twelve (12) new homes and could potentially double or triple the numbers from last year. We're also seeing an increased interest in Milford from businesses and have shown several properties. M. Ciardelli inquired if there were any comments about Milford from the perspective businesses. M. Bender said that several companies are looking at Milford as a crossroad, a centralized location where customers can come from the smaller surrounding communities. J. Langdell added that the EDAC has been talking that up from the inception. M. Bender said we

are talking to a commercial realtor about listing the Brox property again but without infrastructure we would have to sell it as raw land. Businesses are looking to relocate or move within town to specific locations based on visibility and traffic counts. We may see the dynamics of Milford change. Steve Desmarais has done a wonderful job with renovating the former Milford Lumber building for Tech Transport who is moving in and adding thirty (30) jobs here.

D. White noted that in March, the voters sent a message that they don't want to pay more taxes. We need to encourage good solid business growth to offset our tax rate. If people see that, it might help the town to get back on track. M. Bender said the Assessor has valued the construction from building permits this year at around \$12M. L. Daley said we are seeing examples of good commercial growth. The Planning Board recently approved a dance studio in the former Fred Fuller warehouse building off Cottage St that is relocating from Wilton into an area that really needs improvement. We're also seeing these types of good infill developments occurring around town. J. Langdell said there should be more discussion about "good business" and what is good for the different areas in Milford. An EDAC subcommittee looked at each of our zoning areas a few years ago, but it might be time to take a look at what is allowed in downtown Milford, a half mile out from the center.

H. Leach gave an overview of the subcommittee's findings which led into a discussion on the zoning and uses in the Oval/downtown area. C. Branon stated that in discussions with prospective businesses, his customers actually focus on the number of pharmacies or other types of businesses to see that Milford is a crossroads community. That is a positive to Milford but we need to figure out how to focus. M. Bender said that he continues to make rounds calling on the larger manufacturing companies in Town and two or three have expressed an interest in economic revitalization. That is a good sign that they are looking to grow their business.

Master Plan update:

L. Daley said this would be a good time to focus on updating the Economic Development and Brox chapters of the Master Plan, both of which were last updated in 1999. Things and ideas for the community have changed and we are at a point where we should revise the chapters to develop a more comprehensive plan that will encompass our vision. A lot of the work has already been done with the 2009 Economic Development Recommendations Report and it is time to enlarge that scope of discussion and modify a very important section of our Master Plan. This group would be a prime candidate to work on this chapter for adoption later this year or early next year. J. Langdell added that when the fostering document was crafted, it was seen as that stepping stone containing core data. There is also data that we can draw from the EDAC community survey. H. Leach noted that the Chamber of Commerce also did a survey about nine months ago and that data can be drilled down. L. Daley suggested forming a sub-committee to draft the actual chapter and then present to this larger group for review and discussion. It might incorporate some of the zoning questions discussed earlier and include our vision of zoning for certain zones along with a more complex overriding policy that incorporates the Selectmen's priorities. J. Langdell said it will be key to engage the Selectmen in this discussion so that their prioritization is incorporated as well.

D. White said the Master Plan is important but people sent a message at the town meeting that not everybody is onboard with infrastructure and we have got to get a comprehensive infrastructure plan for the town. This group will need to initiate, educate the voters and support the Selectmen for good infrastructure to get good development. They need to see the need and the implications to businesses. J. Langdell added that the other message heard was that we need prioritization and maintenance across the board with roads, bridges, buildings, the oval, parks, playgrounds and schools. How can we build something new when we can't maintain what we have already. L. Daley suggested that hard data be shown to support these projects. M. Bender stated that the Board of Selectmen is onboard with infrastructure although they chose to not support this past year's road bond. Staff had proposed a \$5M warrant article for roads that was based on specific data from Cartegraph and hopefully the Board can support that this year. W. Hunt added that we need to have priorities and a PR campaign. T. Hutchins as one of the topics in our series and maybe we could assign that to Milford.

Souhegan Valley Chamber of Commerce – Regional Issue Series and Associated Topics:

T. Hutchins explained that the Chamber is planning out a series of regional workshops to be held on the second Thursday of the month from September through January. We are still looking for a sponsor to help underwrite some of the costs and to secure all the speakers. W. Hunt suggested putting some edited videos of the speakers on

the PEG access station. T. Hutchins said we used Keene's recent series as a model and are partnering with NRPC, to do five workshops that will be held in different towns on the following topics:

- Workforce development and population health; the skills gap, training, and opioid crisis.
- Infrastructure; roads, bridges, water and sewer.
- Digital and broadband; effect on economic development.
- Transportation; the condition of regional roads future bus service and rail
- Energy; the impact of high cost in NH
- Tourism, arts & culture; attracting visitors to the region, roles of non-profits, lodging needs

T. Hutchins also noted that the chamber has an economic development committee that is discussing how we can leverage our resources to help the regional towns. Milford, with all its issues, is still chugging along pretty well in comparison to some of the other towns. Amherst has real issues with their sign ordinance, especially along 101A, where some of the businesses are being fined by their franchises because they can't put the required signs out. Wilton is struggling with vacant spaces. Brookline has been unsuccessful at trying to attract businesses and events. Our next step will be to sit down with Town Administrators and Community Development Officials to see what can be done collaboratively.

M. Bender said, on the municipal side, Jim O'Mara from Amherst and I have met multiple times to talk about ways to share resources between the towns. We have also brought Tad Putney into the group and we will reach out to some other towns as well. There is a fair amount of municipal cooperation out there. One of our accomplishments has been putting a municipal agreement in place with Amherst for building inspector coverage. L. Daley added that several communities are part of the EPA MS-4 stormwater permitting process and we are working with NRPC to regionalize resources involving tracking, water quality testing and assets.

H. Leach stated that when her job relocated from Milford to Amherst she realized how dramatically better Milford is. There is such a stark difference just five minutes down the road and if development didn't move up 101A into Amherst, their economic development discussions would be very different. Maybe that's something we can promote for Milford; we have an active economic development council, the Milford Improvement Team, welcoming and helpful people at the town offices, and more collaboration between businesses and the schools.

Business Retention & Expansion Program: State of the Souhegan Valley Economic Summit:

D. Jalbert said there were two subcommittees that percolated out of the original discussion. The education subcommittee met once on 12/10/15. We talked about the skills gap, the need to populate the program advisory committees and marketing the applied technology center to the community that we are a resource for training. The open house was in February and our current students got to hear from community members about their futures and being ready for career, ready for college, and ready for life. Our sophomores got to see all the different career pathway opportunities that the ATC offers. The model we're trying to promote is the student who comes out of high school with marketable skills. We also went to the Middle School with flyers that encouraged the eighth graders to bring their parents to that open house, but unfortunately we didn't get many. It is discouraging to look at the enrollments in the CTE program for next year. Our numbers are going down, despite all our efforts to make students and their parents aware that there are other pathways to success. Until the community at large gets the message, we will still struggle. The other subcommittee, Workforce Business, met on 12/16/15 and we covered some of the same topics but didn't really come away with an action plan, as such. We seem to be all over the place, like buckshot, from infrastructure to vacant buildings to workforce development to transportation. There should really be more of a focus or priority in order to be able to get something done, and done well.

H. Leach said there was a panel discussion for the business classes at the high school. A group of business students currently in college were brought back to talk about what would have helped them in high school to prepare for their college route. There was good discussion and constructive feedback for the business teachers at the high school.

T. Hutchins said we've held several job fairs in the Milford Town Hall over the past few years partnering with the Welfare Department and Share and last year's was very successful. Due to member requests for a location closer to 101A, we held it at the Nashua Sports Academy. It was advertised and promoted on social media but there

were a few constraints and we only had maybe twenty people show up. We had a great speaker, the VP from human resources at Dyn, a technology company in Manchester that has grown 400% in the last year. She stated that because unemployment is so low, they've actually been stealing employees from other companies and are looking out of state.

D. Jalbert added that with a 2.6% unemployment rate, we haven't had any applicants for the precision machining instructor position. We reached out to our advisors and to Hitchiner and Airmar for help but they can't even fill their positions and discussion on the difficulties of the current workforce status followed.

J. Langdell suggested this group focus on updating the Economic Development and Brox sections of the Master Plan so that we have a foundation for some kind of policy and that process should engage the Board of Selectmen which gets to the infrastructure prioritization and promotion; make this a short term goal. H. Leach suggested creating an end task by forming two or three smaller groups of 4-5 to work on the various chapters or an infrastructure group and focus the skillset on that smaller group. We also keep talking about the website, promotion and communication which is an entirely different skillset from infrastructure. It's really hard to get fifteen people together to work on the master plan and we could break it down into these special skillsets. M. Ciardelli inquired how Milford's website and PR compared to other towns. J. Langdell said she looks to see how they are promoting themselves and Peterborough is a great example with their website and some communities have paper brochures. The bottom line is "why should businesses and residents come to Milford?" H. Leach said that the Planning Board site award could be promoted and maybe we do press releases or letters to the editor letting the community know what is going on. W. Hunt stated that MIT has all that on our website and suggested partnering with the school system to help us communicate this information. They have a huge database and referenced this past year's pumpkin festival parking. H. Leach said a communications group would be a good small entity. M. Bender stated that the look and feel of the Town's website could definitely use an update although we put new information up regularly. L. Daley noted that the website should be used as a communication tool for the public and working in tandem with the school system would promote information to a wider audience. J. Langdell inquired if the Town would be using the Nixle system for communications regarding traffic and construction. L. Daley replied yes. The communications sub-committee would roll the website, marketing and communications into one. T. Hutchins brought up promotion for the businesses on South St that will remain open during the construction. It could be a short term project for this group and going back to the BR&E report, this group could stop in at those businesses to see how they're doing and let them all know it's temporary and how much better it will be when completed. J. Langdell said that could be the jumping off block for the communications subcommittee. W. Hunt brought up the parking study where she and Mark walked around. Maybe we could update the map showing all the parking lots and spaces. The problem we had was that she sent it to an extensive list of businesses but none of them put it up on their websites. So how do we get the information out there? L. Daley said that social media is one prong of communication and many people now use it as a source for receipt of information and their news. We have opportunity to promote positive projects on the website or Facebook. J. Langdell added that Tim Finan is doing an awesome job trying to get some of that out on the Town of Milford Facebook page. T. Hutchins also suggested making rounds to all the local groups in town to promote the positive aspects.

M. Ciardelli asked where infrastructure will fit in between the two subcommittees; master plan or communications. M. Bender suggested a small group for infrastructure and a brief discussion on how to implement that ensued.

Other Business:

J. Plourde said there will be a music festival at the Milford United Methodist Church in August to benefit the Greater Nashua Area Habitat for Humanity. Maybe we could also use that to promote the downtown businesses during the event.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00AM.

MINUTES APPROVED ON 10/26/16